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ABSTRACT

Infants have definite personality characteristics from birth onward. Despite wide variation in infant temperament styles, ranging from easy to difficult, responsive parents and non-parental caregivers can ensure positive emotional-social development. This paper, which reviews various theories and research on personality development in infants and toddlers, begins with a discussion of self-esteem and the caregiver's role in early childhood. The next section investigates the role of temperament and the importance of caregiver understanding of an infant's basic temperamental type (easygoing, difficult, slow to warm up). Three infant personality theorists and theories are examined next, including: Erikson and the well-regulated infant/toddler personality; Mahler and the infant/toddler separation/individuation struggle; and attachment theorists and intergenerational personality effects. The paper next explores parental sex role stereotypes and their influence on infants. Finally, prosocial development is addressed. The paper concludes that the road to positive personality development in infancy begins with competent caregivers, and that secure emotional attachment to a caregiver is important for positive mental health, including high self esteem, cooperation and compliance with adult mentors, and prosocial rather than aggressive response patterns. Contains 38 references. (SD)

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INFANT TEMPERAMENT AND PERSONALITY

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ABSTRACT

Infants have definite personality characteristics from birth onward. Despite wide variation in infant temperament style,ranging from easy to difficult, responsive parents and non-parental caregivers can ensure positive emotional-social development. Secure emotional attachment to a caregiver is important for positive mental health, including high self esteem, cooperation and compliance with adult mentors, and prosocial rather than aggressive response patterns. The achievement of self regulation and control as well as zestful motivation for problem solving tasks are integral facets of infant/toddler personality development.

Key words: infant personality; temperament; attachment

INFANT TEMPERAMENT AND PERSONALITY

The idea that babies have individual,unique personalities from birth onward is of fairly recent origin. A review of researches into temperament styles, attachment relationships, sex role socialization, and the roots of prosocial and aggressive interactions increases our understanding of the origins in infancy of later differences in interpersonal functioning. This paper will address the ways in which such researches, when integrated with child development concepts, deepen insights into the emergence of early individuality in personality patterning.

Such knowledge becomes particularly important in the light of recent societal changes in caring for infants. In 1965 only 17 percent of mothers of one-year-olds were in the labor force; in 1991 the figure was 53% (Carnegie Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children, 1994). Thus, not only families but non-parental caregivers need to understand the origins of positive mental health and the caregiver's role in the process of promoting positive personality development. Unfortunately, developmentally appropriate care for infants in childcare classrooms has been reported for only 8% of surveyed centers nationally (Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Team, 1995).

Self-esteem

The notion that caregivers need to nurture empathically the earliest organization and functioning of infant personality was already strongly emphasized over a half century ago by

psychoanalytic therapists such as Winnicott (1965/1988). Even earlier, Charlotte Buhler (Buhler et al., 1953) counseled that "Emotional security can only be provided by parents, because the depth of affection necessary for such security arises from a relationship that is based on long association and mutual need. When this emotional bond...is disturbed by sibling rivalry for parental affection, when parents are unstable, when they neglect or reject their children, serious emotional disturbances result" (p.36).

Rather than focusing on intrapsychic conflicts as Freud had done, Harry Stack Sullivan (1953/1968) highlighted the importance of unconditional maternal tenderness. He contrasted this with the pernicious effects of excessive maternal anxiety, irritability, or hostility. A toddler so stressed would then express a "basic malevolent attitude" (p.214) and develop an essentially hostile and unloving personality. Maternal anxiety and lack of tenderness would lead to an infant's development of what Sullivan called the "bad-me" aspect of the self system.

A sense of self is early learned (Lewis & Haviland, 1993). Lewis & Brooks (1978) observed the reactions of babies to regarding themselves in a mirror when a spot of rouge was surreptitiously marked on the face. Increasingly, between 15 months to two years, babies touched the mark on their own face in recognition of the self. As self-awareness develops, babies begin to be able to say "Me", "Mine" and "I".

Sullivan noted (1953/1968) that "The basic vulnerabilities

to anxiety [are] in interpersonal relations...The tension of anxiety, when present in the mothering one, induces anxiety in the infant" (p.41). He predicted that anxieties communicated by the mother could lead to pervasive disruptions - in swallowing, or being able to fall asleep well. Anxiety disrupts the development of rational thought, leads to selective inattention, anger, rigidity, apathy, and a "great deal of what comes to a psychiatrist for attention" (p.160).

The development of positive self-regard and self-acceptance as personality traits in early childhood depends crucially on the caregivers' provision of unqualified acceptance, tenderness and respect along with firm, fair rules. Zimmerman & Revathy (1994) cite the fact that one-third of Emmy Werner's sample of infants, born on the island of Kauai at high-risk for later personality difficulties, grew up as resilient adults with positive self-concept and feeling they had control over their lives. Children in this resilient group "had the opportunity when they were infants to establish a close bond with at least one caregiver from whom they received abundant positive attention" (p.3)

Caregivers support infant perception of personal esteem when they reflect delighted admiration and personal regard for the baby. They permit the infant to explore safely and to choose freely among toys judiciously provided. Babies with sturdy personalities learn that they have **control** in their world.

This learning about personal effectiveness begins with the ways in which caregivers respond to infant needs for feeding and

bodily caresses. Babies who grow up with healthy self esteem learn: "When I cry, someone cares. When I am uncomfortable, someone feeds me or changes me and makes me feel better. I am lovable. I am precious to my parents." Provision of opportunities for babies to play freely with a variety of interesting stage-appropriate toy materials, whether store bought, or pots and pans, also increases opportunities for infants to feel personally powerful. Looking at the hazards of developing maladaptive behavior among 125 children of mentally ill parents, Rutter (1985) found that resilience and adaptive personality functioning characterized most of the children studied over a ten year period. He concluded that resilient personality arises out of a belief in one's own self-efficacy as well as a repertoire of social problem-solving skills.

The Role of Temperament

Temperament is an individual's characteristic style of responding to and engaging with the environment. Babies come with built-in differences in temperamental characteristics that can support or interfere with healthy personality development. Hagekull (1994) has explored possible relationships between infant temperament types and the Five Factor Model whose dimensions have been considered sufficient to account for important variations in adult individual personality differences.

Longitudinal researches across social class reveal the early appearance, stability, and persistence of basic temperamental traits. These result in either easygoing, difficult, or slow-to-

warm-up personality development (Block, 1971; 1982; Thomas & Chess, 1977). Easy babies generally respond in a positive mood, quickly establish rhythmic regularities in feeding, eliminating, and sleeping routines and adapt well to new experiences.

Difficult young children tend to have a negative mood, cry frequently, be unpredictable in bodily activities, and slow to accept new experiences. They have a low threshold of tolerance for discomfort and react intensely to distress. Slow-to-warm up babies are cautious, low key in mood, have a low activity level, act suspicious and tend to avoid rather than approach/accept the new (whether caregivers, foods, or routines).

Some babies are highly distractible; they may be diverted rather easily from an activity which a caregiver considers dangerous or destructive. Others will be hard to disengage from their goals, whether to bite a neighboring baby or to reach a forbidden cookie jar on a table. Infants with long attention spans tend to persist at activities for lengthy periods of time. Other babies need almost constant supervision and re-focusing by an adept caregiver. They engage but briefly with materials and flit rapidly from one interest to another without in-depth explorations of the play potential of any particular toy.

Heredity does seem to be related to temperament types. For example, twin studies report a heritability index in the range of .50 to .60 (Ploman et al., 1993). However, far more important for later personality development is the "fit" between caregiver and infant temperament type. Imagine a highly impatient,

explosive parent, suspicious, and intensely aggravated by budding infant skills (such as baby using her newly empowered crawling ability to get into the garbage pail). If the parent has an irritable infant who is passionately negative in her own responses to distress, this mismatch does not bode well for infant personality development. However, strong emotional support from a husband plus positive early maternal engagement with baby does lead to secure infant attachment to mother by one year despite early high infant irritability (Crockenberg, 1981)

Infant Personality Theorists

Several child development theorists have been particularly helpful in increasing understanding of infant/toddler personality development. Conceptual sophistication enlightens and motivates more appropriate infant care practices.

Erikson and the Well Regulated Infant/Toddler Personality

Erik Erikson (1950), a neo-Freudian psychoanalyst, elaborated on the fundamental need of infants for maternal warmth, stability, regularity, and harmonious mutuality of parent-infant engagements. The dialectic of parent/infant interactions ideally results in a positive balance that supports a firm sense of trustworthiness (rather than mistrust) of self and of caregivers. This favorable balance secures a confident foundation for infant mental health. From warm mutuality in interactions, the infant learns "I am OK. My folks cherish me and delight in me. They care about making me comfortable, so it is worthwhile to struggle to learn all the strange requirements of

adults, such as peeing in a potty or eating with utensils."

Erikson admired the way in which more primitive culture groups indulged infants, carried them close on the body, and gratified their needs for nursing. Brazelton's (1977) pediatric study of Lusakan mothers in East Africa confirms the importance of **body intimacy** to stimulate infant development of advanced interpersonal alertness. He reports that a mother winds a dashica around her own and the infant's body, with head and shoulders unsupported. The infant is free to nurse at will. Within a few weeks the infant is in advance of control babies in "alerting to voice and handling, in quieting when handled, and in social interest" (p. 49). Bodily tenderness enhances the growth of a deep somatic sense of trust and of self-esteem in infants.

Erikson particularly noted that for each stage in early personality formation there are organ modes and modalities that are more likely to be involved - "incorporation", for example, in early infancy. Infants sip sights through their eyes, suck milk with their mouths, absorb caresses through their skin. Well modulated satisfaction of infant modalities leads to more positive personality development.

Caregivers in the infant/toddler rooms of the Children's Center in Syracuse, New York based their practices on Eriksonian prescriptions for positive personality development. They provided high quality infant/toddler care with warm cuddling interactions, generous holding in arms and prompt feeding when the infants were hungry (Honig, 1993a; 1993b, 1993c).

Beyond the development of a higher ratio of basic trust than mistrust, Erikson saw the second emotional learning task, in toddlerhood, to be the development of a balance between asserting one's own will and meeting the needs and requirements of others. Sometimes an infant is thwarted in expressing personal needs. She wishes to stay a bit longer in diapers rather than be forced into too-early potty training. Baby is forced to comfort herself through compulsive body rocking rather than receive tender stroking and holding on a lap. Then that thwarted toddler may well develop a deep sense of doubt about her capabilities. Raging temper tantrums are an attempt to coerce from a caregiver the love and focused attention the baby craves, but is rarely and perhaps grudgingly given. Very young, such children exhibit personality signs of not being able to play in coordinated and competent fashion with toys and peers. They run away from or cling to and shadow an adult. They spill, mess, and disorganize with toys in order to gain the coveted attention of an adult who is emotionally unavailable. Spirals of inappropriate emotional interactions lead to difficult behaviors of toddlers from whom the caregiver tends to withdraw. This arouses ever more desperate and probably inappropriate measures from children so doggedly seeking the recognition and acceptance they need (Fraiberg, 1987; Sroufe, 1983)

Parents sometimes ignore, ridicule, or sternly squash a toddler's budding wilfulness. A permanent sense of doubt about the wiseness of his own choices, or a sense of shame or rage or

mixtures of such emotions often becomes a dominant theme of the child's personality. Children who have been born with triggery, intense and difficult temperaments are particularly vulnerable to unharmonious parenting. They may develop disagreeable personality characteristics long before they enter the early school years.

Too permissive a parenting approach can also result in personality distortions. The toddler whose every whim is gratified (such as allowing him to fall asleep on the living room floor rather than have a regular bedtime routine or allowing her to have lots of sweets just before mealtime) may also develop a coercive personality. That toddler becomes a tyrant who threatens to disrupt adults by tantrums and aggressions, particularly in public spaces, such as the grocery check-out line. A young child with a chronic disability, such as asthma, can "control" parents by threats to hold the breath or become upset to the point of an asthma attack. Then terrified parents may "give in" to the extent that the toddler grows into a tyrannical youngster with a personality that not only adults but peers find aversive.

Mahler and the Infant/Toddler Separation/Individuation Struggle

Psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler also conceived of the growth of infant personality as a stage-like process. Through judicious and sensitive management, parents help baby negotiate the process of "individuation-separation". The baby struggles to find a way to internalize the loving secure sense of mothering received. Infants work hard at becoming separate little persons, comfortable with independence while they remain deeply sure that

adult nurturing and support will still continue (Kaplan, 1978).

Mahler's felicitous term "hatching" describes the gradual progression during the early months from inwardized infant responding (for example, to hunger pangs) to a greater interest in the outer world. By about five months, the bright-eyed infant sits enthroned securely on a parent's arm. Now she turns outward with genuine enjoyment to explore the curiosities of the world - other persons, other sights and events. Next comes the "practicing subphase". The baby adventurously crawls off into space, ready to explore the unknown beyond the nursery door. Parents and caregivers sustain the growth of a sturdy, positive personality by beaming approval as the baby bravely pads onward. Infant courage and self-assuredness flow from the adult's expressed pleasure, reassurance, and secure availability as the infant ventures farther and then returns to "home base". The apex of joy for infant personality development occurs at about 12-15 months with the attainment of autonomous, upright locomotion. Certain that the caregiver is there to protect him, the emboldened baby delightedly cruises vertically on his own, albeit with spills and tries.

During the next Mahlerian phase, "rapprochement", the infant becomes fatefully aware that he is forever separate from his parents. Fearful of vulnerability if he rejects their support, yet deeply desirous of growth toward independence, the baby seesaws in emotional conflict. Often moody and crabby, the infant

from about 18 months onward can become quite demanding. He heaps toys in the parent's lap, sweeps aside mama's book and imperiously wants his book read instead. Yet, even more fiercely the toddler wants to grow to be a free and independent, competent preschooler. He shadows the caregiver yet darts away if the adult, for example, turns to restrain him for a diaper change. Toddlers are struggling through a difficult emotional period. Caregivers who wish to nurture positive personality development must develop tolerance for toddler quirks. Also helpful is a well-honed sense of humor for toddler absurdities. As they care for a conflicted toddler who wants both to grow up and to be a well-cared for, dependent baby again, adults will indeed need reserves of calm and tolerance.

Personal individuality is consolidated by the end of toddlerhood. Mahler calls the resolution of this personality struggle "constancy". Disappointments can now be better tolerated. The toddler succeeds in internalizing the loving parent rather than needing to coerce the caregiver constantly. There is a sense of sturdiness and confidence in accepting short separations, such as nursery school, without undue anxiety. The growing cognitive capacity of the child at the end of the infant/toddler period means that baby absolutist emotional thinking that a parent is either good or bad becomes modified to include the "greys" and contradictions of ordinary feelings. Because of their limited cognitive abilities, babies and toddlers have an all-good or all-bad view of persons. Yet, the same "bad"

papa who forbade the toddler a candy bar just before supper is also the loved and loving papa who snuggles the child and reads a story at bedtime. The personality journey from an inward-turned infant to older toddler who has achieved the beginnings of personality "constancy" is a splendid achievement of the first few years of life.

Attachment Theorists and Intergenerational Personality Effects

The seminal work of psychoanalyst John Bowlby (1989), of Mary Ainsworth and of Mary Main (Bretherton & Waters, 1985) reveals the powerful and subtle role of infant attachment in shaping early and later personality development. Each attachment is a unique individual relation built through interpersonal contact between a baby and a particular adult. The attachment behavioral system in an infant is integrated and balanced with the exploratory system and with the fearfulness system. When a baby is wary or frightened, the attachment system is activated so baby seeks out the trusted caregiver.

Every infant develops an internalized working model of each relationship that includes affective as well as cognitive components and is likely to be stable and operate outside of conscious awareness. When a caregiver is consistently nurturant, holds baby tenderly for feedings, provides floor freedom for explorations, and is available to interpret and promptly comfort infant distress, then baby grows up securely attached to that caregiver. Ainsworth labels these infants "B" babies. To assess attachment classifications she developed the Strange Situation

paradigm that involves consecutive 3-minute episodes of infant/parent togetherness, separation, and time with a stranger.

Reunion behaviors with the parent are crucial for rating the quality of infant attachment. The securely attached infant greets and accepts comfort from the parent. She relaxes and molds onto the parent's body. Secure babies are able to go back to play and explore constructively once the parent returns after a brief separation. Later in toddlerhood, when introduced into a situation that requires attempts to solve difficult tool-using tasks, the secure B baby reacts with enthusiasm, cooperates with parental suggestions, and tries zestfully and persistently to succeed (Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978).

Insecure babies when placed as toddlers in this difficult problem-solving situation are more likely to cry. They give up easily, act oppositional to parental suggestions, and throw temper tantrums. When insecure babies from low-income families are further stressed by frequent daily separations from a parent, personality difficulties arise early (Farber & Egeland, 1982). Daycare quality becomes of critical importance in such cases to "buffer" the baby against personal anguish and to sustain positive personality development.

From the security of the parent's embrace, B babies favor even strangers with dazzling smiles and acceptance. Later, in preschool, they play more peacefully and cordially with peers. Mothers of securely attached infants have higher self-esteem scores and report more positive recollections of their own

childhood relationships with parents and peers (Ricks, 1985). Secure attachment is a powerful personality attribute that has intergenerational consequences.

Insecure babies are characterized as "A", avoidantly attached, "C", resistant/ambivalent, and "D", dazed or disorganized/disoriented. Mothers of A infants dislike cuddling or bodily contact. Mothers of C babies tend to be asynchronous with their babies' desires. They meet their own needs, rather than attune to their baby's particular needs, tempos, styles, or specific discomforts.

During reunions, A babies act indifferent to mothers, avoid eye contact, and ignore maternal social bids. Preschool teachers rate earlier-classified A babies as more withdrawn. They don't persist at tasks with determination, and are more exhibitionistic and impulsive; some are more hostile, aggressive, and bullying. Both A and C babies, when later rated by preschool teachers blind to their infancy classification, exhibit significantly more personality difficulties in peer play than B babies (Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985).

In the Ainsworth paradigm, C babies are likely to try to obtain comfort from the parent on reunion, but then wriggle away or strike out against the parent. As preschoolers ,they have difficulties getting along with peers and are bullied more often. The baby of an abusive parent is markedly more likely to develop avoidant insecure attachment. Indifferent, emotionally unavailable parents are highly likely to have insecure infants,

whose affective regulation is at risk and whose intellectual development is strongly negatively affected as well. Teti et al. (1995) report that when mothers are depressed, then 80% of infants and 87% of preschoolers are assessed as insecurely attached. Busy dual career parents need to hone their noticing skills, so they are sure to attend to infant behaviors that signal an infant's need for more tuned-in intimacy (Honig, 1990).

Stressed caregivers need social supports to boost personal satisfactions and enhance subtle cue-reading and effective interaction skills. When parents are stressed by poverty or neighborhood violence in addition to family dysfunction, energetic social outreach programs become an urgent societal imperative. Support programs beginning prior to birth can be the most cost effective investment for preventing personality difficulties that lead to grave social costs in later years. Morin & Honig (1995) report that foster care costs due to placement after confirmed child abuse were more than five times higher per child than the costs of providing a parenting outreach program for teen mothers recruited prior to the baby's birth.

Parental Sex Role Stereotypes: Influence on Infants

Parental treatment of infants based on stereotyped gender role concepts can influence infant personality markedly. Sometimes baby boys are made to feel like "sissies" for needing a blanket, wishing to play with a doll, or acting shy rather than boisterous when confronted with strange people or play possibilities. Years later, as fathers, these males may have

difficulties getting in touch with tender feelings with their own infants. Infant girls who are overprotected from playing in more adventuresome environments absorb messages that "Girls must not get messy or dirty; they can't try as many different games as boys." Both male and female babies need to be encouraged to become **both** agentic and tender, assertive/effective and gentle, as facets of their gender role development (Honig, 1983). Learning about personal effectiveness can be thwarted when parental rigidity in perception of sex role "appropriateness" of certain child behaviors or activities distorts infant development of personal empowerment.

Prosocial Development

Proclivities toward altruistic or aggressive behaviors as personal ways of relating to others begin during infancy (Pines, 1979). Yet Piaget (1970) suggested that prosocial characteristics such as altruism, helpfulness, and empathic concern over others' distress are not within the cognitive capabilities of very young children. Indeed, Piaget claimed that the cognitive capacity to "decenter" and take the point of view of another was not developed until the end of the preschool period and the beginning of the elementary grades. Nevertheless, personality development research with infants and toddlers provides clear evidence of very early sharing and caring. Rheingold et al., (1976) in a home-like laboratory room staged an episode where a role-playing adult dropped and spilled a huge bag of groceries. Toddlers 15 and 18 months old helped their own parents and the experimenter

pick up spilled groceries and messy items, while cheerfully announcing " Me help clean up dis mess!" For infants 12, 18, and 24 months, Hay (1979) documented the very early occurrence of sharing and cooperation. Toddlers were able pleasurably to repeat discrete actions of a play partner; they participated in at least one cooperative exchange, such as a ball game, a pretend phone call, or give-and-take sequences, such as showing and giving objects to a parent.

Researches by Yarrow and Zahn-Waxler (Pines, 1979) reveal that as early as one year, some babies will comfort others who are crying or in pain. Although the infant may comfort the exhausted parent by offering his own bottle or blanket, rather than the cup of tea or backrub that the adult could use, emotional sensitivity to pain in another person and efforts to comfort another do appear very early. Before the age of two years, some toddlers displayed even more sophisticated altruistic behaviors, such as picking up a cracker from the floor for a crying peer in a high chair and returning the cracker to the peer rather than eating it. Some tots even soothed the hair of a crying baby and murmured "No c(r)y baby" as they attempted to comfort the crying baby.

What kinds of parenting interactions did Yarrow and colleagues find most likely to foster the early personality development of baby altruists? Mothers who: (1) expressed firm disapproval in not accepting aggression as a means for their infant to resolve social conflicts, (2) were empathic and tender

when the child was distressed, and (3) modeled loving care to the child and others, had toddlers who were much more empathic and cooperative with peers and others in distress. "These behaviors were stable as indicated by teacher ratings five years later" (Honig & Wittmer, 1992, p. 348).

Conclusions

Personality development is the outcome of complex interactions of genetically based factors, intimate social-emotional interactions, and societal impacts. Insights into how caregivers can facilitate positive personality growth are particularly urgent when non-parental caregivers are increasingly called on to care for infants and toddlers. Caregiver training is essential. Adults can learn to become sensitively attuned to each infant's temperamental style and fundamental needs for intimate, responsive, tenderness. Awareness and empathic good will energize adult provision of quality care so that bullying and sociopathic amorality are far less likely to occur. Tuned-in parents and parent surrogates increase the probability that infants and toddlers will develop into persons capable of empathy, compassion, and genuinely positive social encounters. They provide security, judicious doses of new experiences, an abundance of caresses, shining eyes, and cooing admiration for infants' budding abilities. The road to positive personality development in infancy begins with competent caregivers.

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